

***NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY***  
***JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE***  
**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**Wrestling the Bear: The Rise of Russian Hybrid Warfare**

by

**Jamie E. Palagi**

***US Department of State***

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by

Jamie E. Palagi

*US Department of State*

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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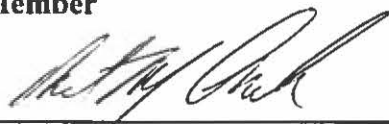


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## ABSTRACT

Carl Von Clausewitz defined war as: “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will”.<sup>1</sup> To that end, the Russian government has waged two major military campaigns since 1991: the invasion of the Republic of Georgia (2008) and the annexation of Crimea from the Ukraine (2014). Russia also conducted numerous other military operations, employing unconventional warfare, irregular warfare and hybrid warfare. Russia has advanced the use of *hybrid warfare* in achieving Russian strategic military objectives, particularly in the *near abroad* - the former Cold War Soviet states, primarily through conducting offensive military operations in sovereign nations just below the threshold of international military response. Hybrid warfare is not currently defined in US Joint Doctrine, however the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) describes it as: “combining conventional, irregular, and asymmetric means, to include the persistent manipulation of political and ideological conflict, and (Hybrid warfare) involves a state or state-like actor’s use of all available diplomatic, informational, military, and economic means to destabilize an adversary”.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the Russian political environment, economic considerations, and select military operations since 1991, with a sharp focus on Vladimir Putin’s strategic leadership, highlights the evolution of the Russian brand of hybrid warfare (HW). The analysis also articulates the current and future implications for the United States and NATO, which struggle to counter regional Russian aggression. Finally, this thesis contends that the US and NATO are unprepared, unwilling, and unable to counter the current threat that Russian hybrid warfare poses, primarily due to a lack of unity of action, common understanding, and a cohesive strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz et al., *On War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 83.

<sup>2</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command. Counter- Unconventional Warfare White Paper September 2014: 3.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Quiet Professionals, who stand ready to defend Freedom against those who would destroy it.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: Introduction - After the Cold War.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Methodology.....	2
<b>CHAPTER 2: Conceptualization of Unconventional Warfare.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Unconventional.....	4
Center of Gravity (COG).....	6
Irregular.....	7
Hezbollah 2006.....	7
<b>CHAPTER 3: Russian Politics and Economic Dynamics since 1991.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Political Environment since 1991.....	10
Enter Vladimir Putin.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 4: Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Estonia 2007.....	15
Republic of Georgia 2008.....	17
The Ukraine 2014: The Overt, Covert Campaign.....	19
MH17.....	22
<b>CHAPTER 5: Countering the Hybrid Threat.....</b>	<b>24</b>
Overview of NATO.....	24
US and NATO response in the Ukraine.....	26
US Leadership in NATO.....	29
<b>CHAPTER 6: Synthesis.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Conclusion.....	31
Hybrid Solutions.....	33
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>42</b>

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. Popular Approval Rating Vladimir Putin.....	12
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Table 1. NATO Member Nation Additions (Post 1991).....	25
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## **Chapter 1: Introduction - After the Cold War**

The breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 marked the end of the Cold War and heralded the evolution of Russian culture, the global economy, and Russia's strategic role in the post-Cold War world. Despite the influx of capital into the emerging Russian markets, the nearly instantaneous privatization of much of Russia's core businesses, and the considerable Russian contribution to the European and Asian energy markets, Russia struggled to define both its strategic economic and geopolitical position in the new world order since 1991.

The globalization of the world's economies, the increasing membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the relative economic solidarity of the European Union (EU), the US Global War on Terrorism, and rising economic and military power of China represent a few of the external strategic influences on the Russian world view. Additionally, socio-economic, cultural, internal political dynamics and other factors resulted in a Russian worldview that perceives growing threats to Russian economic security, social ideology and border integrity. Essentially, Russia - and more directly - Vladimir Putin perceive that Russia is in an ideological struggle with the US and Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Carl Von Clausewitz defined war as: "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will".<sup>2</sup> To that end, the Russian government waged two major military campaigns since 1991: the invasion of the Republic of Georgia (2008) and the annexation of Crimea from the Ukraine (2014). Russia has also conducted numerous other military operations, employing unconventional warfare (UW), irregular warfare (IR) and hybrid warfare (HW). Russia has

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Rywkin, "Russia: Mythology in the Service of Realpolitik," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36, no. 3 (2014): 195, <http://search.proquest.com/nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1545535275?accountid=12686>. (accessed on 4 December 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz et al., *On War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 83.

advanced the use of *hybrid warfare* in achieving Russian strategic military objectives, particularly in the *near abroad* - the former Cold War Soviet states, through conducting offensive military operations in sovereign nations just below the threshold of international military response. Hybrid warfare is not currently defined in US Joint Doctrine, however the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) describes it as: “combining conventional, irregular, and asymmetric means, to include the persistent manipulation of political and ideological conflict, and (Hybrid warfare) involves a state or state-like actor’s use of all available diplomatic, informational, military, and economic means to destabilize an adversary”.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of the Russian political environment, economic considerations, and select military operations since 1991, with a sharp focus on Vladimir Putin’s strategic leadership highlights Russian successes in leveraging hybrid warfare to strategic ends. The analysis also articulates the current and future implications for the United States and NATO, which struggle to counter regional Russian aggression. Finally, this study contends that the US and NATO are unprepared, unwilling, and unable to counter the current and future threat that Russian hybrid warfare poses, primarily due to a lack of unity of action, common understanding, and a cohesive strategy.

### **Methodology**

As the world continues to wrestle with reemerging Russian regional, and potentially global aggression, this thesis provides a conceptualization of Russia as a state actor, masterfully employing hybrid warfare-to strategic ends. This research explores the Russian strategic operational environment since the end of the Cold War (1991), and the West’s limited means and ways to counter Russian Hybrid warfare in the post-Cold War frontier.

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<sup>3</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command Counter- Unconventional Warfare White Paper September 2014: 3.

This thesis utilizes an historical research approach to determine the relative context and doctrinal enumeration of unconventional, irregular, and hybrid warfare that will frame and inform the exploration of Russia's innovation in employing hybrid warfare. Through a concise review of the Russian economic, political, and military evolution since 1991, this thesis provides a framework to articulate the current Russian hybrid threat, as well as the political, social, and economic foundations for Russian external conflicts since 1991. Contemporary information and trends are incorporated and applied to substantiate potential future threats, both from a Russian-centric view, as well as from the perspective of NATO and the US.

Next, though the lens of current U.S. military joint doctrine, unconventional warfare and historical examples, this thesis briefly conceptualizes key components of unconventional warfare, irregular Warfare, and the logical emergence of hybrid warfare. Additionally, reinforced by analysis, this thesis identifies the discrete components of the Russian hybrid threat and differentiates the factors that limit both the common understanding and appropriate responses to this threat.

Finally, this thesis explores the evolution of Hybrid Warfare, through the unique case study that Russian military actions since 1991 and current geopolitical tensions provide. This discussion includes the implications of the synthesis of this information, makes limited recommendations, and determines where further research is necessary to better conceptualize Hybrid Warfare.



## **CHAPTER 2: Conceptualization of Unconventional Warfare**

Unconventional warfare is as old as war itself. In fact, The United States of America achieved independence from England through the conduct of a major unconventional warfare campaign. The US Revolutionary War encapsulated several aspects of unconventional warfare, with the French directly supporting the American Colonials to conduct a proxy war against the British Empire. The British Army was superior to the American Revolutionaries in almost all quantifiable metrics: overall numbers, training, logistics, and technology. The American revolutionaries utilized asymmetric tactics and conducted guerilla warfare against the British Redcoats; the most formidable military force existing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The result was the defeat of a super power and the birth of a nation, all made possible through unconventional warfare.

In a modern context, US joint doctrine articulates UW as: “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”<sup>1</sup> After the United States coalesced as a nation and subsequently rose as a hegemonic power, it conducted UW in numerous military campaigns and operations, often in support of resistance movements, insurgencies, and conventional military operations. Examples of this include the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II and later in Vietnam with the US Special Forces work with the Montagnards. In a modern context, Afghanistan provides specific and relevant examples of UW employment.

The USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 created a new front in the Cold War. The

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary of Military And Associated Terms, Joint Pub 1-02, as amended 15 December 2014, p. 263. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf)

US played a pivotal role in changing the course of the conflict, through operationalizing advanced US technology through the Afghan Mujahedeen and employing sound UW. US military involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s is characterized as a successful, semi-covert action employing a proxy force (the Mujahedeen), trained by US advisors, and provided with advanced US military technology (e.g., the Stinger missile system). The tactical employment of the Stinger missile system led to strategic second and third order effects in nearly eliminating Russian the close air support capability, and diminishing the Russian national will to continue to fight in Afghanistan. The US successfully conducted a small scale UW campaign that directly resulted in countering Russian regional aggression and prevented Soviet expansionism in Afghanistan.

The events following Sept 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 again brought the US military back into Afghanistan, with US Special Operations Forces (USSOF) conducting UW through the Northern Alliance forces to disrupt the Taliban's control of Afghanistan. The initial phases of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), conducted from late 2001 to early 2002 remain an example of one of the most successful modern examples of a UW campaign in modern US history. The USSOF brought the full measure of US airpower to bear, combined with the guidance and targeting of the Northern Alliance commanders. This effectively minimized both the effects of the Afghan terrain and the historical difficulty for conventional forces to navigate and maneuver effectively. Where the US campaign in Afghanistan of the 1980s utilized the Mujahedeen as a proxy force to diminish Russian air power, OEF harnessed the full dominance of US air power through USSOF and the Northern Alliance to attack the Taliban. This resulted in the Taliban's removal from power in Afghanistan within a period of months, an exceptional example of employing US conventional power in an unconventional manner.

As the US campaigns in both Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001- est. 2015) encompassed initial and/or limited UW employment with tremendous success, other elements came to bear in the overall conflict. Arguably, the US achieved nearly all the stated military objectives in both the 2001 Afghanistan military campaign and 2003 Iraq military campaign, yet both countries' stability and future remains uncertain. Insurgents, non-state actors, terrorist organizations, and other unconventional threats remain active in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In both campaigns, the military tactical and operational successes faced a common strategic challenge: the difficulty in crafting a central, representative government to unite the disparate populations and interests within the countries. History shows that the resulting protracted military campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan ultimately ebbed and flowed with the US national will to support the campaign. The common denomination in all three countries (the US, Iraq, and Afghanistan) is the *population and national will* as a strategic Center of Gravity (COG).

### **The Center of Gravity (COG)**

US Joint Doctrine articulates the COG as “the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act”.<sup>2</sup> In the realm of UW, irregular warfare (IR) and hybrid warfare, the conceptualization of the population as the COG is an essential point of departure for all discussions. At a national level, the population generally determines the national will to initiate, maintain, or discontinue a conflict; also known simply as *popular support*. The nation where the conflict is being waged comprises one of the target populations, and the influence of third nations may play an enormous role in the trajectory of the conflict initiation, conduct, and resolution.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary of Military And Associated Terms, Joint Pub 1-02, as amended 15 December 2014, p. 35. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2015).

Target populations can be easily conceptualized in the current conflict in Ukraine, with the Ukrainian population, the ethnic Russian population residing within the Ukraine (especially eastern Ukraine) and the Russians. Additional target populations include other former Soviet states, NATO member nations, and the United States. Strategic messaging, subversive tactics, and other coercive activities are central to waging in UW, as is influencing the will of target populations in a conflict.

### **Irregular Warfare**

The US military defines IW as: “A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”<sup>3</sup> It is important to differentiate IW from UW, as it specifically encompasses the non-standard, non-state, or otherwise irregular forces that act in a conflict, outside of the regular or conventional military forces. In the American Revolutionary War, the American Colonials were the irregulars. Russia has heavily leveraged IW and irregular forces in prosecuting its hybrid warfare campaign in eastern Ukraine.

Although certainly not a new conceptualization, IW was only integrated into US Joint Doctrine in 2007, as the US struggled to maintain both legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations in Iraq and Afghanistan. IW is an integral element of hybrid warfare, and its relatively recent entry into US doctrine directly reflects the lack of institutional focus US doctrine has placed on this concept, despite a significant historical relationship.

### **Hezbollah 2006**

Much of the world considers Hezbollah to be a terrorist organization. However, the

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Dictionary of Military And Associated Terms, Joint Pub 1-02, as amended 15 December 2014, p. 127. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jpl\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jpl_02.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2015).

organization is based in Lebanon and occupies seats in the Lebanese government, and has grown into a significant regional and strategic entity. Hezbollah is proven to be a highly resilient and adaptive irregular military force, with a long and active history waging direct and indirect warfare against the state of Israel. Furthermore, Hezbollah is openly and directly supported, funded, trained, and equipped by Iran.

In the 2006 Lebanon War, Hezbollah conducted a campaign against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) that represented a significant evolution in unconventional, irregular, and hybrid warfare. Hezbollah employed both conventional and unconventional tactics, waging guerilla warfare as a proxy force in denied territory, equipped with modern Russian military equipment.<sup>4</sup> While the US faced a rising insurgency in Iraq, the IDF was essentially being tactically defeated through Hezbollah's ability to innovate conventional tactics, technology, and guerilla warfare. Furthermore, Hezbollah forces maintained operational nimbleness and an advantage on the battlefield by exploiting unsecure Israeli communications.<sup>5</sup> The 2006 Lebanon war is significant as it included several essential elements of hybrid warfare: the employment of conventional tactics in an unconventional manner, an irregular force operating in denied territory, the persistent manipulation of political and ideological conflict, and the proxy support of Iran in fighting a common enemy in Israel.

In summary, when considering the evolution of hybrid warfare, it is essential to revisit the definition provided by USASOC: "combining conventional, irregular, and asymmetric means, to include the persistent manipulation of political and ideological conflict, and (Hybrid warfare) involves a state or state-like actor's use of all available diplomatic, informational,

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Hoffman, "Lessons from Lebanon: Hezbollah and Hybrid Wars." *Foreign Policy Research*, No. 2 (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid warfare and challenges", *JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly*, pp. 34-48.

military, and economic means to destabilize an adversary”.<sup>6</sup> This provides a basis for examining hybrid warfare through historical examples of unconventional warfare (the American Revolution and US campaigns in Afghanistan) and centers of gravity through influencing target populations. Finally, examining irregular warfare and irregular forces through the lens of the 2006 Hezbollah war furthers the development of the hybrid warfare paradigm. Missing from the above examples is the active employment of all the instruments of national power in conducting hybrid warfare.

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<sup>6</sup> United States Army Special Operations Command. Counter- Unconventional Warfare White Paper September 2014: 3.

### **CHAPTER 3: Russian Political and Economic Dynamics since 1991**

Russian President Boris Yeltsin inherited the *new* Russia with the abrupt collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. As the former communist regime attempted to stabilize and form its new governmental structure, the US and its allies remained essentially bystanders, not direct supporters of the *new* Russia, focused primarily on Russia's ability to govern - and most importantly - maintain full control of Russia's substantial nuclear weapons arsenal.

#### **The Russian Political Environment since 1991**

The election of US President Bill Clinton (1992) marked a shift in US foreign policy towards Russia, as President Clinton understood that global security was intertwined with Russia's ability to govern effectively.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the US supported and influenced the international community to infuse capital into Russia to support Yeltsin's efforts to reform the government and provide a stable way forward for Russia. Yeltsin's attempts at governmental reforms in Russia were not embraced by the whole of government, as the old communist regime did not simply disappear overnight and had consolidated its power base within the Russian Parliament. Yeltsin's softening of relations with the West did not sit well with the members of the old regime, specifically active members of the Russian parliament.

This multipolar, internal Russian political tension came to a head during the Russian Constitutional Crisis of 1993, where Yeltsin eventually employed the military to disrupt the ongoing power struggle between the presidential office and the Russian parliament. The governmental crisis resolved with the consolidation of Russian presidential powers, sweeping constitutional reforms (diminishing the overall power of the parliament), and set the stage for an

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<sup>1</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, *Lonely Power: Why Russia has Failed to Become the West and the West is Weary of Russia*. (Carnegie Endowment, 2010), 18.

evolution, that nearly became a revolution in the dynamic and evolving Russian political environment, just two years after the breakup of the USSR.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Yeltsin's definitive, albeit politically extreme action, resulted in Russia's consolidation of presidential powers and the Russian Federation's slow march through political reforms into a globalized economy, set against the intensification of global resource competition.

Moving into the current millennium, the Russian Federation has since been termed a *Hybrid Regime*<sup>3</sup>, with the underpinnings of the old communist system shadowing the way forward for the largest former member of the USSR, which originally consisted of 15 member states. A 2001 characterization of the Russian government, is as follows:

“The regime survives by co-opting representatives of the main political and social groups into the framework of the government, replacing ideology with constantly changing eclectic rhetoric, deliberately postponing strategic choices, and orienting itself toward stability rather than breakthroughs. All this allows the regime to preserve its diverse base of support and its leader's high poll ratings, and makes it hard for an alternative or an opposition to form.”<sup>4</sup>

This holds true in 2015 and offers one explanation for why the Russian Federation is also termed *Tandemocratic*, with Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin essentially swapping positions as president and prime minister for more than the last decade.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Archie Brown. "The October crisis of 1993: context and implications." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 9.3 (1993), 183-195.

<sup>3</sup> Liliia Fedorovna Shevtsova and Mark H. Eckert. "Russia's Hybrid Regime." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 4 (2001), 65-70.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>5</sup> Henry E Hale and Timothy J. Colton, "Russians and the Putin-Medvedev" Tandemocracy" A Survey-Based Portrait of the 2007-2008 Election Season." *Problems of Post-Communism* 57.2 (2010): 3-20.



## Enter Vladimir Putin

The current Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has served as the Russian president since 2012, his third presidential term. Putin first served as the Russian prime minister from 1999-2000, Russian president from 2000-2008 and again as prime minister from 2008-2012. As of January 2015, Putin is in his 16<sup>th</sup> year of strategic leadership in Russia and enjoys approval ratings in the range of 80-85% in January 2015, near an all-time high (illustrated in Figure 1):

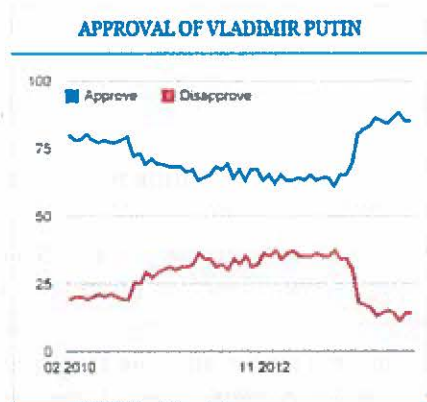


Figure 1<sup>6</sup>

However, Putin's rise to power was described in 2001 as follows:

"The post-communist Russian regime remains in flux. After coming to power, Vladimir Putin attempted to rationalize Boris Yeltsin's 'elective monarchy' and to regulate relations among the various segments of the political class. He succeeded in weakening the patrimonial character of the regime and, in place of Yeltsin's 'atmosphere of mutual tolerance,' introduced elements of subordination and subjection. Yet the preservation of the mechanism of personal rule and the weak separation of powers are obvious reasons why even this rationalized system remains vulnerable. At any moment, the atrophy or weakness of one block within the vertically organized 'presidential pyramid' could lead to the collapse of the whole structure, as happened with the Soviet state."<sup>7</sup>

That fourteen year old statement still reflects the contemporary view that Putin's apparent

<sup>6</sup> Yuri Levada Analytical Center. "Approval Rating of Vladimir Putin." <http://www.levada.ru/eng/> (accessed on 4 January 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Liliia Fedorovna Shevtsova and Mark H. Eckert. "Russia's Hybrid Regime." *Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 4 (2001), 68.

popularity is not representative of the weak separation of both the government and the heavily energy leveraged economy, to both of which Putin is directly tethered.

Privatization of major sectors of the economy and extreme corruption and economic nepotism punctuated the transition of the USSR's centrally planned economy to the Russian Federation's globally integrated market economy. The vast majority of Putin's personal wealth is directly derived from the energy markets, with Putin owning significant portions of formerly state owned, now private businesses: "37 percent of the oil company Surgutneftegaz and 4.5 percent of natural gas monopoly Gazprom."<sup>8</sup>

In framing the current Russian strategic political environment, it is essential to note that Putin's personal wealth is estimated to be in the range of \$40-\$70 Billion dollars, and he is regularly cited as one of the wealthiest and arguably most powerful men in the world.<sup>9</sup> It is almost unquantifiable to define the geo-political, economic, and social influence that resides in Putin in the modern, globalized economic community.

Bloomberg estimates that the both the Russian economy and Vladimir Putin, both captives of the global energy market, are severely affected both by the current US and European economic sanctions and plummeting oil prices, with oil falling to less than \$50/ barrel in January 2015, the lowest price since April 2009.<sup>10</sup> In the near term, the development of US shale oil production market is predicted to continue to drive down the price of oil, further negatively impacting Russia's-and Putin's economic prospects.

The evolution of Russian hybrid warfare is directly correlated to the singular strategic

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Adomanis et al., 'Vladimir Putin', *Forbes*, last modified 2015, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/vladimir-putin/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Bloomberg, 'Energy & Oil Prices: Natural Gas, Gasoline And Crude Oil', last modified 2015, accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/energy/>.

direction and leadership provided by Vladimir Putin. Putin successfully operationalized his hybrid warfare strategy only through the singular vision and trajectory afforded by 16 consecutive years in executive office. The nature of US political dynamics, including the electoral cycle, term limitations, and the separation of power limits any one individual's ability to hone and focus the instruments of national power into a similar instrument of hybrid warfare, as Putin accomplished in Russia. Putin, through his *tademocracy* successfully crafted a unity of effort to effectively develop, operationalize, and wage hybrid warfare.

To that end, the Russian government recently operationalized and employed effective hybrid warfare through conducting an innovative military campaign in the Ukraine to achieve strategic military objectives in the region (i.e. the annexation of Crimea). The employment of hybrid warfare enabled Russia to conduct covert military operations just below the threshold of response that would require a direct international military intervention. Strong diplomatic condemnation and sweeping economic sanctions have been the net result of international response, creating measurable economic impacts on Russia. However, as of the writing of this thesis, the West has taken no overt military action in response to Russian action.

In conclusion, Putin's lengthy tenure in Russian political leadership, coupled with his significant personal investment in the Russian economy are two key linkages in the evolution of Russian hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare hinges upon the actor's ability to leverage all the instruments of national power (in a military capacity) to strategic ends. The unique relationship that Putin crafted with the Russian instruments of national power operationalizes HW in a manner that other nations – particularly *democratic* countries would not be able to attain.

#### **CHAPTER 4: Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare**

The Russian government experienced both a real and perceived diminished role in regional and global affairs over the last two decades.<sup>1</sup> At the direction of Vladimir Putin, Russian armed forces took numerous internal and external security and military actions to counter both actual threats (Chechen extremists conducting terrorist operations within Russia's borders) and perceived threats (the expanding role of NATO in former Soviet Union states). In Chechnya and surrounding regions, the largely Muslim population rejected the central Russian government, and extremists launched internal terrorist attacks, such as was the case in the Beslan school incident in 2004.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Chechnya, the Russian military largely leveraged conventional military operations, counter terror (CT) operations, and non-hybrid warfare based approaches to maintain influence over a region that poses both an irregular and unconventional threat to Russian interests. However, Russia demonstrated a decidedly unconventional approach in reacting to a perceived threat outside of Russia.

##### **Estonia 2007**

In 2007, the government of Estonia removed a Soviet era monument from the capital of Tallinn. That decision sparked widespread protests from the ethnic Russian population within Estonia. However, something else occurred, which had far broader implications for Estonia, former Soviet republics, and the world: a debilitating cyber-attack that affected the Estonia government, banking systems, and nearly shut down the infrastructure of the country. The comprehensive cyber-attack was attributed to Russian servers and Russian hackers; reports that

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<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov. "Russian dilemmas in a multipolar world." *Journal of International Affairs* 63.2 (2010): 19.

<sup>2</sup> John Giduck. "Terror at Beslan." *United States: Archangel Group Inc* (accessed 02 January 2015).

the Russians denied.<sup>3</sup>

This event was significant for several reasons. First, Russia exercised not only its tactical capability to launch this type of attack, but also its strategic ability to do so in the apparent defense of ethnic Russians living in former Cold War states.<sup>4</sup> This employment of cyber warfare was the first salvo of Russian hybrid warfare, not only with the direct effects that the attack had on cyber infrastructure, but the strategic implication that Russia could directly influence foreign populations within sovereign nations, on a large and previously unseen scale.

Furthermore, Russia utilized both state (Russian IT infrastructure and employees) and non-state assets (leased servers, contracted hackers) to engage the desired target. The Russians leveraged strategic messaging by globally denying any culpability in the attack. The strategic Russian message was delivered to the world: we are ready, willing, and able to actuate ethnic Russian populations and tensions, regardless of where the internationally recognized borders are drawn. Putin's government also demonstrated a willingness to conduct military campaigns to protect ethnic Russians and/or Russian speaking people, wherever they exist: "What effectively Putin has now said, is that the defence of ethnic Russians does not lie in the countries in which they reside or with their laws, government or constitution, but with Russia. This blows a hole in everything we understood about international law."<sup>5</sup>

This is especially informative when considering the percentage population of ethnic Russians in three former Cold War states, now members of NATO. Estonia has an ethnic Russian population of 24.8 %, Latvia with 26.9 % and Lithuania with 5.8%.<sup>6</sup> Should Russia

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Finn, "Cyber Assaults on Estonia Typify a New Battle Tactic." *Washington Post* 19 (2007).

<sup>4</sup> There are approximately 25 million ethnic Russians living outside the Russian Federation.

<sup>5</sup> Liam Fox, Former UK Secretary of Defence, "Hybrid war- hybrid response?" NATO Review Magazine. <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/Russia-Ukraine-crisis-war/EN/index.htm>, (accessed on 22 Jan 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Strafor Global Intelligence, "Baltic States Concerned about Large Russian Minorities" <http://www.stratfor.com/image/baltic-states-concerned-about-large-russian-minority> (accessed 14 January 2015).

conduct similar cyber or other hybrid warfare operations within those three nations, particularly in Estonia or Latvia, the ramifications would be significant, due to the relatively high percentage of ethnic Russians located within its borders. Even if the intent is not to actuate the target populations (ethnic Russians), Putin's contemporary perversion of protecting Russians "wherever they exist" may serve a justification to assert legitimization of the attack. The higher concentrations of ethnic Russians (in former Cold War states) may increase both the probability and the socio-political impact of any subversive Russian governmental actions within sovereign nations.

The potential implications of the NATO mutual defense agreement must be carefully considered when using the Estonia cyber-attacks of 2007 as a point of reference and departure in the further analysis of Russian Hybrid Warfare. When considering cyber-attacks, the issue of direct attribution remains central to the discussion. Notwithstanding the international consensus on the roots of the 2007 Estonian attacks, the potential deniability of the offensive operation supports the Russian desire to be heard but not seen as an external actor in a border state's instability. This hybrid tactic was amplified in Russian regional aggression just a year later in another former Soviet Republic.

### **Republic of Georgia 2008**

On August 7, 2008 Russia invaded the Republic of Georgia with conventional military forces, penetrating Georgian territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia stated the military overt military operation was legitimate, as Russia had the right to protect ethnic Russians residing in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This was the first ground invasion conducted by Russia since the end of the cold war and the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the military action again indicated Russia's willingness to violate international norms in conducting



provocative direct ground conflict to achieve Russian military objectives.

In the days just prior to Russian ground forces entering Georgian territory, Russia launched Cyber-attacks in support of impending conventional operations. The cyber campaign included both distributed denial of service (DDOS) and the sabotage of legitimate websites<sup>7</sup>. Accompanying the cyber-attacks, IT infrastructure was also damaged, so as to limit the Georgians' ability to communicate both immediately before and during the conventional military operations.

The Russian military effectively attacked the information technology infrastructure, resulting in the collapse of landline communication, cellular networks, and the internet. Additionally, Russian civilian hackers perpetuated attacks on Georgian websites, causing both Georgian governmental and private sector websites to display pro-Russian messages for varying periods of time. The desired effect of creating confusion and perceived instability amongst the Georgian population amplified the conventional Russia military forces' freedom of movement.<sup>8</sup>

Russia achieved its strategic goals and military objectives through operationalizing cyber-attacks, mobilizing both conventional ground and irregular forces, and seizing historically contentious territory in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Robert Nalbandov described the role of the Russian irregular forces as follows: "This time the former appropriateness was enhanced by a better grounded and legitimized Russian support to the ethnic kin of North Ossetians in Georgia through protecting Russian citizens in South Ossetia. In turn, Russia's military actions brought it quite evident and beneficial consequences from the perspective of its pure self-interest."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jose Nazario, "Politically Motivated Denial of Service Attacks." *The Virtual Battlefield: Perspectives on Cyber Warfare* (2009): 163-81.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Klimburg, "Mobilising Cyber Power." *Survival* 53, no. 1 (2011): 41-60.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Nalbandov. "Battle of Two Logics: Appropriateness and Consequentiality in Russian Interventions in Georgia." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2009): 20-36.

Regardless of the true strategic rationale behind the Russian invasion, the world was clearly strategically messaged that the near abroad was Russia's territory to manage. Furthermore, Russia signaled that it had both the capability and capacity to operationalize hybrid warfare on an expanded scale, combining a cyber-attack with a conventional ground invasion. Following the cessation of hostilities between Russia and the Republic of Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia effectively ceded to Russia.

Through both a geo-political and hybrid warfare lens, Russia's true strategic objectives may have included messaging to the former Cold War states, NATO, and the US that the near abroad is and would remain Russia's interest to manage. However, the strategic end state may have been the exact opposite of what the Russians intended. Following the Russian invasion, Georgia continues to seek NATO membership and support from the west, in particular from the United States. This Georgian desire to increase direct relationships with NATO and the US was reinforced after 2008, as Georgia continued its force contributions to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, as well as providing force structure to the international coalition forces in Iraq.

### **The Ukraine 2014: The Overt, Covert Campaign**

Russian statecraft, military doctrine, and history is steeped in the employment of *Maskirovka*- a Russian term commonly thought of and referred to simply as deception. However, *Maskirovka* is much more than simple deception or misrepresentation alone. *Maskirovka* is a tactic that is based in deception but extends further into a holistic strategy designed to mislead, misinform, and alter perceptions of all observers of the action. Furthermore, *Maskirovka* is intended to mask the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of any given action, therefore altering perceptions of the target population and of the Russian population as well.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Shea. "Post-Soviet *Maskirovka*, Cold War Nostalgia, and Peacetime Engagement." *Military Review* 82, no. 3 (2002): 63.



This Russian tactic, historically utilized by the Soviets, is an essential element of Russian hybrid warfare. Military deception is a time honored military tactic, and the Soviets harnessed their brand of deception to maintain secrecy, fear, and doubt amongst the population and maintain the core power of the central communist government.

In 2014, Russia executed a highly successful hybrid warfare campaign in the Ukraine that left NATO, US, and the world pondering which response could counter the offensive Russian military activities in both the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. History has yet to fully define the relative strategic success or failure of Russian hybrid warfare within the borders of the Ukraine, however, the Russian military campaign has already had a measurable and lasting effect in the Ukraine-with the distinct potential to redraw international borders in eastern Ukraine.

In the true essence and execution of Maskirovka, the following is a common report made during the military operations conducted early in 2014, and clearly demonstrates the employment of Maskirovka: "Unidentified assailants stormed the parliament building in the city of Simferopol in Ukraine's semi-autonomous Crimea republic on 26 February, the Associated Press, the and RFE/RL reported. The assailants have not made any demands or issued any immediate stations, although put up a sign reading Crimea is Russia. Assailants also hurled a flash grenade in response to questions from an unidentified journalist."<sup>11</sup>

As increasing brazen Russian involvement intensified in the Ukrainian conflict, third party entities, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), proportionally increased the deliberate accuracy of their reporting on the unidentified military

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<sup>11</sup> "Unidentified Assailants Storm the Parliament Building in Ukraine's Crimea." *Jane's Terrorism Watch Report* (Feb 27, 2014), <http://search.proquest.com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1503207619?accountid=12686>. (accessed on 03 October, 2014).

forces present in the Crimea: “Spetsnaz-style muzzle brakes on Russian AK-100 series assault rifles; VSS (Vintorez) suppressed 9 mm sniper rifles issued primarily to Spetsnaz units for undercover or clandestine operations; Russian RPG-26 anti-tank rocket launchers; Russian NVD 1P93 and USP-1 weapon sights; Russian 6B43 bulletproof vests, 6Sh117 tactical vests and ShBM helmets; and Russian R-168-0,5UME tactical radios.”<sup>12</sup> It was evident that Russia conducted an overt, covert campaign, and seized Crimea with the full intention of eventually annexing the strategic naval geography. Further Russian military objectives and strategic goals remained unclear, true to Maskirovka.

Direct Russian military involvement in the Ukraine became clear long after Russian irregular and proxy forces took action in the destabilization of the Ukrainian government and the activation of the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. The breadth and depth of the military operation had immediate and dramatic effects on both the Ukrainian population and the ethnic Russians residing in the region. The conflict is ongoing and unresolved as of the writing of this study. However, conclusions and strategic implications can already be drawn from this conflict.

With the annexation of Crimea and threatening deeper Russian supported military operations further into eastern Ukraine, it appears that Russia inadvertently increased Ukrainian nationalism, resulting in Kiev allying closer to the West. Through land-grabbing Crimea, Russia severely damaged its historically tenuous relationship with the Ukraine and the international community. Russia paid a heavy price in lost international legitimacy that may ultimately negate

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Felstead and Georg Mader. "UPDATE: OSCE Evidence Lifts Lid on 'Little Green Men' in Crimea." *Jane's Defence Weekly* 51, no. 16 (Mar 12, 2014), <http://search.proquest.com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1507956226?accountid=12686>. (accessed on 10 October 2014).

the tactical benefit of acquiring Crimea (and potentially acquiring swathes of eastern Ukraine).

With that high price tag in sharp resolution, Michael Rywkin offers analysis into the potential strategic motivation for the Russian campaign in the Ukraine, through Putin's own words:

"The analysis of Putin's post-Crimean speech shows his underlying stance: Russia has been humiliated, lied to by the United States, and rejected by Europe. These have caused Russia to seek redress. Ideological differences between the American and the Russian way of seeing the world and their own country's position remain the basis for Putin's defiance of the post-Soviet world order. He brings back the principal myths behind Moscow's ideological posture, including the idea of 'Moscow as Third Rome' and of 'Russia as elder brother' (whose mission is to gather smaller nations around the Russian core). Opposite paths taken by the United States and by Russia -- national uniqueness and social conservatism in Russia, multiculturalism and political correctness in the United States -- have only deepened the geopolitical conflict between the two."<sup>13</sup>

### MH17

On 17 July, 2014 Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, transiting from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, crashed killing all 298 passengers and crew on board. Initial reports and the subsequent investigation point to the distinct probability that the aircraft was deliberately shot down. The deaths of nearly 300 men, woman, and children, having nothing to do with the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine, immediately heightened international outrage concerning the conflict.<sup>14</sup>

This event signaled an unintentional escalation in conflict when pro-Russian rebels incorrectly targeted a civilian airliner, while assuming they were targeting a Ukrainian military cargo aircraft. The gross miscalculation, combined with the probable employment of a Russian furnished advanced surface to air missile (SAM) system, posed two significant complications in

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<sup>13</sup>Michael Rywkin, "Russia: Mythology in the Service of Realpolitik." *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36, no. 3 (2014): 195, <http://search.proquest.com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1545535275?accountid=12686>. (accessed on 4 December 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, "Malaysia: Dutch Report suggests MH-17 shot down from ground." <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/09/us-ukraine-crisis-mh17-investigation-idUSKBN0H40LM20140909> (accessed on 26 October 2014).

the Russian hybrid warfare campaign: collective international outrage and direct attribution and Russian culpability. Although this event did not generate a military response, it is significant as it solidified direct support for expanded US and NATO led economic sanctions against Russia, if not only as a result of the *perception* of Russian culpability in the tragedy.

In summary, the evolution of Russian hybrid warfare can be traced through the escalation of tactics employed from the 2007 cyber-centric attacks in Estonia, seemingly stemming from a perceived insult to Russian nationalism to the 2008 combined cyber-attack enabled conventional invasion of the Republic of Georgia. Finally, the 2014 large scale employment of proxy and irregular forces in the Ukraine that resulted in the annexation of Crimea suggests an expansion of Russian hybrid warfare employment. Over a relatively short period of time, a Putin-led Russia demonstrated the capability, capacity, and the willingness to ignore international norms, conduct offensive military operations in former Cold War states to achieve military objectives and strategically message its neighbors, NATO, the US, and world at large.

## **CHAPTER 5: Countering the Hybrid Threat**

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded following the conclusion of World War II on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1949 and it is an organization predicated on mutual defense. NATO membership is open to “any other European state in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area,”<sup>1</sup> and currently has 28 member nations.

The North Atlantic Treaty includes 14 Articles, which outline the structure of the treaty itself. Most notably, Article 5 reads as follows:

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security”.<sup>2</sup>

Article 5 obligates collective defense of all 28 member nations against any threat and has only been invoked once since NATO’s inception in 1949 - by the United States following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Article 5 lies at the root of the potential for miscalculation and interpretation in the hybrid warfare operating environment. Russia’s offensive hybrid warfare actions in non-NATO former Cold War states could have implications should the conflicts result in corollary actions in other nations. Specifically, the Cyber-attack element of hybrid warfare is one example where a NATO state could be either directly or indirectly adversely affected by a

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<sup>1</sup> NATO. <http://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html> (date accessed 15 September 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

hostile state or non-state actor, where Article 5 could become a factor.

Conversely, from a Russian-centric perspective, NATO dramatically expanded after 1991, enveloping numerous former Cold War states: “Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has expanded significantly, adding 12 members to its ranks, 10 of which were former members of the rival Warsaw Pact (illustrated in Table 1 below). Three of these - the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania - directly border mainland Russia and the committee particularly highlights ensuring their defence, as guaranteed under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.”<sup>3</sup> The significant growth of NATO, directly infringes on Russian borders, and the Russian convention of the near abroad. Simultaneously the US military continues to build coalitions and conduct global operations by, with, and through several former Cold War states primarily in support of contingency operations in Afghanistan, as was the case in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, etc. These combined factors contribute to the Russian conceptualization of NATO and the US as a threat, ever expanding and creeping closer to Moscow.

**Table 1: NATO Member Nation Additions (Post 1991)<sup>4</sup>**

<b>1999- Czech Republic</b>	<b>1999- Hungary</b>	<b>1999- Poland</b>
<b>2004- Bulgaria</b>	<b>2004- Estonia</b>	<b>2004- Latvia</b>
<b>2004- Lithuania</b>	<b>2004- Romania</b>	<b>2004- Slovakia</b>
<b>2004- Slovenia</b>	<b>2009- Albania</b>	<b>2009- Croatia</b>

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas de Larrinaga, Update: NATO 'unprepared' to deal with russia. Jane's Defence Weekly 51, no. 36

<sup>4</sup> NATO. “NATO Member Countries.” NATO. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/nato\\_countries.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/nato_countries.htm) (accessed on 3 November 2014).

## US and NATO response in Ukraine

Despite the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine, the US and NATO have been able to do little to contain Russian regional aggression. The US and international response in the Ukraine were limited to only two instruments of national power-Diplomatic and Economic. The US strategy appears to rely on diplomatic efforts, but no measurable effects are seen by either the Ukraine or NATO as a result of US diplomacy. US and EU economic sanctions have sent the Russian economy into depression like conditions, with the Russian government struggling to stave off massive inflation. However, this is also the net result of Russia failing to leverage previous oil profits, with the energy market also exceeding five year lows.<sup>5</sup>

The primary reason for the limited response in the Ukraine, Peter Pindjak postulates that: “Unlike conventional warfare, the ‘centre of gravity’ in hybrid warfare is a target population. The adversary tries to influence influential policy-makers and key decision makers by combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts. The aggressor often resorts to clandestine actions, to avoid attribution or retribution. Without a credible smoking gun, NATO will find it difficult to agree on an intervention.”<sup>6</sup> This is an accurate and essential characterization illustrating why Russia’s current military actions in the Ukraine are difficult for the international community to counter. The international community struggles to come to consensus on exactly how to resolve the conflict - militarily or otherwise. Nations are unwilling to commit to conflict in the modern operating environment without direct, verifiable attribution.

Ambassador Kurt Volker, Former US Ambassador to NATO, made the following

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<sup>5</sup> Business Insider, “Russia’s Downgrade Paints a Horrific Picture of Economic Collapse.” <http://www.businessinsider.com/russias-economic-collapse-2015-1> (access on 11 January 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Pindjak, NATO Review, ‘Deterring Hybrid Warfare: A Chance For NATO And The EU To Work Together?’, *NATO Review*, last modified 2015, accessed December 27, 2014, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/Also-in-2014/Deterring-hybrid-warfare/EN/index.htm>.

assessment of NATO and the US ability to respond to the current and future Russian hybrid threat: "Russia is going to use special operations and intelligence forces, economic pressure, energy pressure, cyber-attacks and potential conventional force directly to achieve imperial goals. And is NATO willing to use any of those tools to prevent that or not? That's what we need to see. I don't think NATO has the tools for that."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this thesis postulates that NATO and the US lack a fundamental tool that Ambassador Volker did not specifically enumerate: a cohesive strategy or policy that addresses countering hybrid warfare. Ostensibly, a reactive strategy has already been placed into action to limit further degradation of the sociopolitical environment and limit further national erosion. However, a cohesive, proactive, and agile strategy will be required to be operationalized through NATO and the US to mitigate the risk of continued or new hybrid warfare in the region.

Key leaders within NATO recognize the new threat that Russia poses with the introduction of the hybrid warfare on an increasing larger scale, as demonstrated across the Estonian, Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts. General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR), stated the following: "We've seen a combination of different offensive elements deployed prior to the annexation of Crimea and now in eastern Ukraine: subversive activity, agitation and social-political moves, cyber tactics, and old-fashioned coercion such as parking tanks in your neighbour's vicinity with the threat of transition to conventional warfare. We need to address all these aspects, from the conventional to

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<sup>7</sup> Ambassador Kurt Volker, Former US Ambassador to NATO, "Hybrid war- hybrid response?" NATO Review Magazine. <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/Russia-Ukraine-crisis-war/EN/index.htm>, (accessed on 22 Jan 2015).



the unconventional.”<sup>8</sup> Articulating the problem and actuating the policy, strategy and the essential elements to counter it, are two different things.

Conversely, Russia took the opportunity to strategically message NATO and the world through its new (2014) military doctrine: NATO is characterized in Russia’s updated and current military doctrine as a threat, signaling the increased NATO membership and regional influence may potentially drive a shift in Russian strategy towards NATO<sup>9</sup>. Military doctrine and national security strategies are a primary source of conventional strategic messaging. However, NATO should merge the conventional strategic messaging with the operationalized unconventional strategic messaging in actuating ethnic Russian populations, stating (Russia) will act in their defense, and conducting offensive military operations in sovereign nations to these ends. Russia has been very consistent in strategically messaging NATO and the US.

In response to this messaging, NATO may consider that future applications for member nation admission may be limited to potentially diminish the appearance of NATO’s growth and perceived threat to Russian borders and regional interests. The Brookings Institution’s Michael O’ Hanlon proposed a contemporary version of this in his opinion article, “Crafting a win-win-win for Russia, the Ukraine, and the West”.<sup>10</sup> O’Hanlon reminds his audience that the Ukraine is not a current member of NATO, and the Ukraine will not likely be considered for NATO membership for the next ten years.

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<sup>8</sup> Brooks Tigner. “NATO works to flesh out details of new readiness action plan”. Jane’s Defence Weekly 51, no. 42, 2014 <http://search.proquest.com/nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1560935573?accountid=12686>. (accessed 10 Octoboe, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Washington Times. “New Russian military Doctrine says NATO top Threat”. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/dec/26/new-russian-military-doctrine-says-nato-top-threat> (accessed on 10 January 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Michael O’ Hanlon and Jeremy Shapiro, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/crafting-a-win-win-win-for-russia-ukraine-and-the-west/2014/12/05/727d6c92-7be1-11e4-9a27-6fdb612bff8\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/crafting-a-win-win-win-for-russia-ukraine-and-the-west/2014/12/05/727d6c92-7be1-11e4-9a27-6fdb612bff8_story.html), Washington Post, December 7, 2014 (accessed on 7 January 2015).

Furthermore, Peter Pindjak highlights that current NATO policy rests solely upon Article V and massive retaliation - a constrictive and restrictive policy that falls short of a cohesive strategy designed to counter a hybrid threat. Pindjak further enumerates the following policy considerations for both NATO and the EU: "First, member states may find it difficult to agree on the source of a conflict, creating a significant barrier to prompt collective action. Second, to counter irregular threats, hard power alone is insufficient. Regardless of how rapid a response may be, deploying military force to an area swept by hybrid warfare will turn out as 'too little too late'. Too often, the conflict evolves under the radar. Finally, a deterrent built upon military force alone will not be credible."<sup>11</sup>

A successful strategy for NATO will almost certainly require the direct involvement, consensus, and support of the European Union (EU). When considering the hybrid warfare threat that Russia potentially poses to all of Europe, it is impossible to disaggregate the collective synergistic deterrence that the EU and NATO could bring to bear. Beyond the economic and informational implications, the EU and NATO combined are "an effective institutional tandem that has a wide range of both political and military instruments at its disposal."<sup>12</sup>

### **Balance of US leadership in NATO**

The 2015 US National Security Strategy (NSS) outlines the role of future US leadership in coalitions that leverages the power of the international coalition vice the United States, indicating that the US must "build capacity to prevent conflict"<sup>13</sup>. In the foreseeable future, the US will continue to be a global leader in conflict mitigation, whether the US desires

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Pindjak "Deterring hybrid warfare: a chance for NATO and the EU to work together?". NATO Review, 2014. <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/Also-in-2014/Deterring-hybrid-warfare/EN/index.htm> (accessed 27 Dec 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> National Security Strategy 2015, Pg. 9, line 335.

responsibility for that role or not. To assure allies and partners, the US must place actions above words, especially in dealing with a nationalistic Russian regional aggression fueled by the Cold War fueled rhetoric of Putin.

President Barak Obama delivered a key address in Estonia on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, in which he clearly outlined the US role in supporting NATO member states and deterring future potential Russian aggression in the Baltic region:

“Second, and in addition to the measures we’ve already taken, the United States is working to bolster the security of our NATO allies and further increase America’s military presence in Europe. The new initiative I proposed in Warsaw this spring includes several elements, and we’re working with Congress to get it done. Here in the Baltics, it would mean positioning more American equipment, so it’s ready if needed. It would mean more training and exercises between our militaries. And it would mean more U.S. forces, including American boots on the ground, continuously rotating through Estonia and Latvia and Lithuania.”<sup>14</sup>

President Obama’s remarks resonated sharply with the world audience, as he directly stated he was willing to put American boots on the ground, a strong endorsement, considering President Obama’s refusal to offer those same boots in the fight against ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

The weight of US leadership will almost certainly be required in all NATO interaction and negotiations with Russia. Russia has demonstrated a hybrid warfare capability that neither the US nor NATO are currently prepared to counter, without requiring conventional military operations - something that the international community is not prepared to undertake. Beyond any written or verbal official policy statements, US leadership countering the Russian hybrid warfare threat will almost certainly require action: reassuring allies, partners, and directly deterring aggressors with the assurance and deterrence that only the presence of US military hardware and personnel can provide.

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Hanrahan, 'Obama Transcript: NATO Will Defend Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania', *WSJ*, last modified 2015, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/09/03/obama-transcript-nato-will-defend-estonia-latvia-lithuania/>.

## **CHAPTER 6: Synthesis**

The threat implications of Putin's pledge to protect Russian speakers wherever they exist has historical implications, current ramifications, and future considerations. International norms, US national interests, and the potential for armed conflict hang in the balance. Prevention is the key to countering future unconventional and hybrid warfare threats. Prevention is best conceptualized here as recognizing the threat, deciding individually (as a nation) or collectively (as an alliance) to act, and countering or offering effective alternative strategic messaging as early as possible. Early and lasting intervention through effective strategic messaging and decisive unified action is of paramount importance in operationalizing the concepts analyzed in this thesis. The US and NATO cannot simply leverage rhetoric and limited economic or military posturing against the highly effective Russian employment of hybrid warfare. Economic Sanctions, in the absence of other instruments of national power, will not be effective in countering Russian hybrid warfare. Accordingly, this thesis makes several recommendations and assertions for countering the Russian hybrid warfare threat, through the lens set of the instruments of national power.

### **Conclusion**

The whole of the United States Government and NATO should carefully consider this analysis of Russian regional aggression, actuated through an evolution of classic UW doctrine: Hybrid Warfare. Although not a new concept by any metric, this thesis demonstrates Russia is the first and only modern state actor to fully employ the full spectrum of hybrid warfare in a modern operating environment, to further national strategic ends, utilizing nearly all instruments of its national power. It is imperative that US and NATO doctrine and policy address continued Russian regional aggression, conducted in a hybrid manner, through all the instruments of national power.

Though the nearly continuous strategic leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia is employing hybrid warfare to further its national strategic interests. The continued employment of Russian Hybrid Warfare, combined with the current lack of understanding and a cohesive US national and international doctrine and strategy, places Russia's actual and perceived adversaries at a distinct strategic disadvantage. Long term vision, national and international unity of effort, and a cohesive strategic vehicle to operationalize the vision is essential in diminishing Russian regional aggression and countering hybrid threats. Prevention is the key to countering future unconventional and hybrid warfare threats, yet the US and NATO are either unprepared, unwilling, or unable to effectively respond to the hybrid threat that Russia poses:

### **Unprepared**

There is limited research on both modern hybrid warfare and the institutional documentation of hybrid warfare. It is undefined in US joint doctrine and the US and NATO do not currently have a published cohesive Counter Hybrid (C-HW) strategy or policy, specific to Russia or otherwise. The US military must clearly identify the reality of modern hybrid warfare in doctrinal language and appropriately staff and source studies to provide the granularity necessary to articulate a cohesive response to the threat.

### **Unwilling**

In the contemporary operating environment, the US and NATO lack the national will and popular support to conduct counter hybrid warfare, which potentially requires the employment of all instruments of national power resident within the nation. Consensus, coalition, and resolution are generally sought out prior to a modern conflict: evidence is presented and attribution is assigned. However, the design and nature of hybrid warfare makes attribution difficult, despite multiple streams of evidence of complicity, as is the case in cyber-attacks. For example, hostile

actors can be traced through servers, IP addresses, and other indicators to specific geographic locations, ostensibly resident within a host nation. However, there remains plausible deniability for the host nation to deny state support, as was the case in the cyber-attacks that occurred in Estonia in 2007 and the Republic of Georgia in 2008, both executed and denied by individuals residing in Russia.

After the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and the ensuing 14 years of US and coalition military campaigns, the West is war weary and reluctant to engage in active warfare, except to protect national interests. The “no boots on the ground policy” that the US maintains in countering the Islamic State of the Levant (ISIL) directly reflects the US executive policy of the increased threshold for the US to engage directly in ground conflict.

### **Unable**

Even if the threshold to enter into conflict is met, and popular support demanded a direct response to Russian hybrid warfare and regional aggression, there is no single lever for instituting a cohesive C-HW strategy across the US instruments of national power. This issue is compounded and amplified further when considering the multinational perspectives of both the EU and NATO, with disparate national interests, national wills, and geopolitical strategies – all factors that bear significance with any Article V considerations.

### **Hybrid Solutions**

US military doctrine states the importance of the integration of all the instruments of national power and the very nature of the hybrid warfare threat: “Competitors now concentrate on the nonmilitary instruments of power in the natural intercourse between nations. Most such intercourse remains peaceful and routine. Enemy competitors, however, use the instruments of

power as weapons.”<sup>1</sup> However, the US strategy in Ukraine, facing a true Russian hybrid threat, fails to engage the full efficacy of the instruments of national power.

The expanded definition of instruments of national power is especially relevant in a continued discussion on the employment of Russia hybrid tactics: the elements of diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL). Russia demonstrated its military understanding of the integration of DIME in Hybrid warfare, and the ability to act cohesively through DIME to achieve strategic military objectives. This study limits its recommendations to the primary aspects of DIME, though additional research is recommend for the implications and applications of the financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (FIL) instruments of national power.

### **Economic Sanctions**

Russia currently struggles, and will continue to struggle in the foreseeable future to stabilize its economy. Current wide ranging economic sanctions directly affect the Russian economy in a manner that will be unsustainable in the near and long terms. The expected lower global demand for energy (due to the US becoming the largest energy producer in the world) will also have negative implications for Russia. Thus far, the results of the economic sanctions on Russia are dramatic: “Total reserves have fallen from \$511bn to \$388bn in a year. The Kremlin has already committed a third of what remains to bolster the domestic economy in 2015, greatly reducing the amount that can be used to defend the rouble (sic).”<sup>2</sup>

In a global economy, it is difficult for consensus on economic sanctions, as the world

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<sup>1</sup>US Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare Field Manual FM 3-05.130 (September 2008), pg. 1-1.

<sup>2</sup> Business Insider, “Russia’s Downgrade Paints a Horrific Picture of Economic Collapse.” <http://www.businessinsider.com/russias-economic-collapse-2015-1> (accessed on 11 January 2015).

economies are, by the very definition of globalization, linked. With current sanctions set to expire in mid-2015, and since the European demand for Russian energy will not be reduced in the near and long term, Russia will most likely ride out the combined effects of the lower oil prices and economic sanctions until the global markets stabilize. US-led sanctions, globalization, and the political dynamics of European Union underpin the key factors in the ability to leverage economics to diminish Russian aggression. After all, Putin has a significant and lasting personal investment in the Russian energy sector.

### **Diplomatic Actions**

Putin's rejection of international norms directly limits the impact of western diplomatic actions in curbing Russian aggressive actions. Russia demonstrated an increasing willingness to both deviate from international norms and deny any culpability on the world stage. The short lived 2009 Russian Reset initiative began with US-Russia bilateral relations at the lowest point since the 1980s, and on the heels of the Georgian conflict of 2008. Although the two attained some mutual goals, the diplomatic initiative abruptly ended and reversed the positive course it was on, when Putin returned as the head of state in 2012.<sup>3</sup> It is essential for the US to remain decisively diplomatically engaged with European partners, such as Germany, and emerging powers, such as Poland, to keep Russian regional aggression at bay. EU nations, Russia's neighbors, are most effective at engaging with the Russian Federation - *by, with or through* Putin.

### **Military Power**

The US Military continues to be the dominant global military power, especially after the

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<sup>3</sup> Ruth Deyermund. "Assessing the Reset: Successes and Failures in the Obama Administration's Russia Policy, 2009–2012." *European Security* 22, no. 4 (2013): 500-23.



galvanization of nearly 14 years of active combat employment through the US campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the US must remain strategically agile in countering asymmetrical threats to US national interests. The rise of non-state actors, global cyber threats, and the persistent threat of violent extremist organizations (VEOs), coupled with increasing world populations and intense resource competition, all factors that contribute to the strategic US threat environment.

Specific to Russian hybrid warfare, the US and NATO need to prepare to leverage unconventional warfare in a defensive manner to counter hybrid warfare in the contemporary operating environment. Leveraging conventional responses to an unconventional problem will have less than effective implications for NATO and the US. Increasing the relatively small footprint of US forces that are regionally aligned and focused is a small step in dissuading future Russian military actions.

Ambassador Kurt Volker, Former US Ambassador to NATO, characterizes how a proactive, yet not necessarily offensive military stance could mitigate current and future Russian military threats: "Some recommend that the best way to counter this is to invite a stronger, not weaker response. What creates de-escalation is a strong response that causes Russia to think twice about going any further, stabilizes a tense situation and then allows it to de-escalate."<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, this study recommends that the US should capitalize on the infrastructure and institutional memory of fourteen years of operational rotations, and reinstitute a similar joint and multinational exercise as the Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER), re-designated as Return of Forces to Europe (REFOREUR). REFOREUR should be conducted on an annual

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<sup>4</sup> Ambassador Kurt Volker, Former US Ambassador to NATO, "Hybrid war- hybrid response?" NATO Review Magazine, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/Russia-Ukraine-crisis-war/EN/index.htm>, (accessed on 22 Jan 2015).

basis, reducing the potential for miscalculation and misinterpretation. Annual rotations will reassure allies and partners of the US preparedness to rapidly respond to any regional conflict.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, REFOREUR should encompass multiple nations, specifically including the Baltic States, Poland, Romania Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – as President Obama directly stated his resolve to utilize the US military to deter Russian regional aggression during his September, 2014 speech in Estonia.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Information Domain**

Strategic messaging plays a tremendous role in both the conduct of hybrid warfare and in countering adversarial efforts. One could draw historical parallels between Russian aggression in the Ukraine and the path to World War II, and this has global implications: “Russia's occupation and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in February and March have plunged Europe into one of its gravest crises since the end of the Cold War.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike the path to World War II, globalization of the world economy, the internet, and social media intertwine and connect the global human terrain unlike any other period in human history. More directly, the world cannot ignore overt Russian regional aggression, the tacit denials that Maskirovka entails, nor accept flaccid attempts to conceal the true origin of military offensive operations conducted in sovereign nations, such as was the case in the Ukraine in early 2014. The US and NATO must increase full spectrum counter messaging efforts and take Russia to task in the information domain to delegitimize Russian regional aggression and offensive military operations. The escalating conduct of Russian

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<sup>5</sup> Jamie Palagi, “ST 6633 Position Paper” Joint Advanced Warfighting School assignment, 22 January 2015.

<sup>6</sup>White House. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/remarks-president-obama-people-estonia> (accessed 20 January 2015).

<sup>7</sup>Jeffrey Mankoff. 2014. Russia's latest land grab: How putin won crimea and lost ukraine. *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3: 60-68, <http://search.proquest.com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/docview/1520424155?accountid=12686>. (accessed on 11 December 2014).

hybrid warfare campaigns since 1991 reflects the West's inability to counter Maskirovka. The lack of counter information/strategic messaging intervention is tacit approval in the Russian world view. Hybrid warfare must be identified, targeted, and countered across all domains, with the information domain providing the connective tissue in the modern operating environment.

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